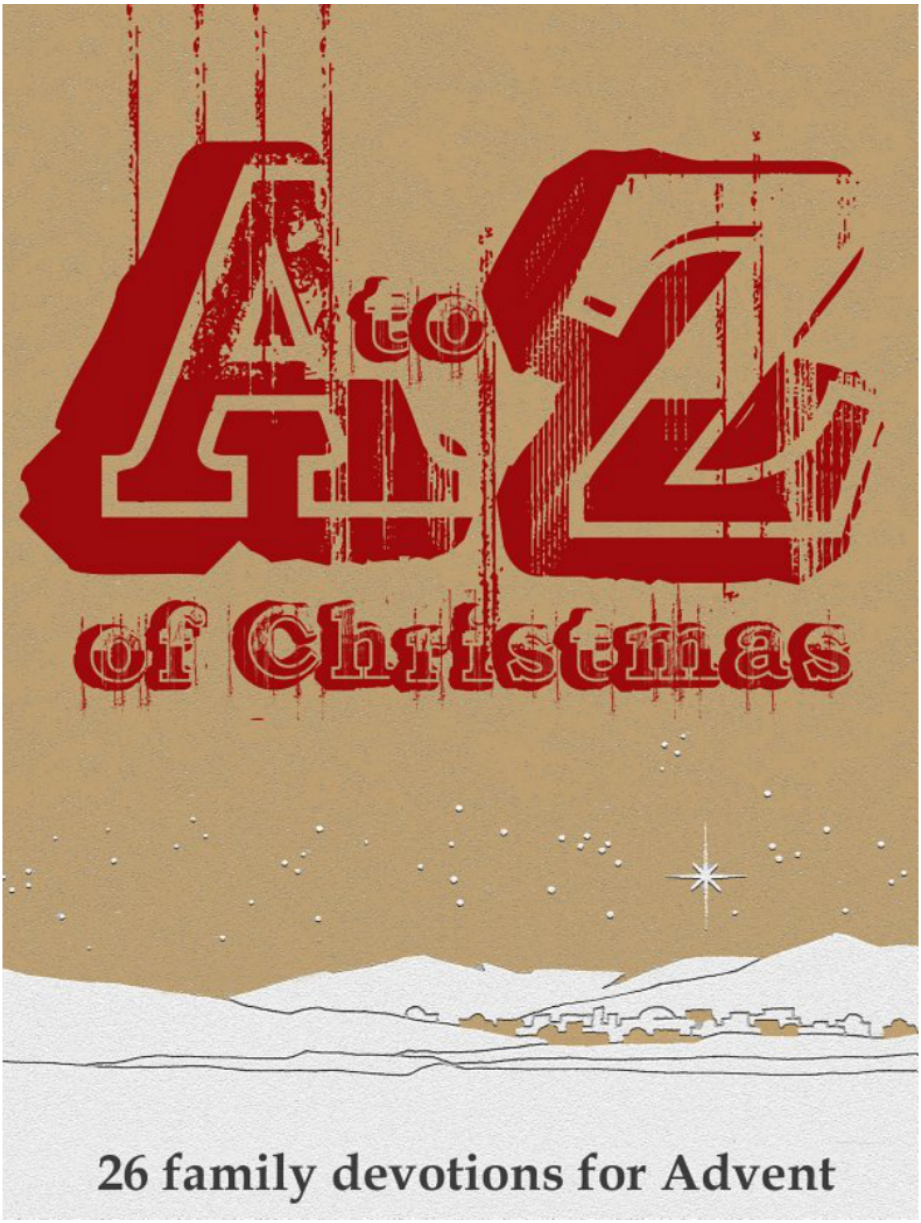
A to Z
of Christmas
26 family devotions for Advent

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Introduction

The A to Z of Christmas is a series of 26 devotions for Advent. Each one tells a little bit of the Bible story, shedding light on Jesus' birth and what it means. There's also a question for each day and a prayer to pray, so it's a great way to explore Advent together as a family and encourage children to think about the broader meaning of Christmas.

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Day 1 – Artist

Advent's a really exciting time. It's all about looking forward to the birth of Jesus, God's gift to the world, and celebrating his coming. But that's not the whole story. God had the whole thing planned out thousands of years before Jesus' birth: and he's still at work in our world today. So let's start at the very beginning …

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

John 1:1

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Genesis 1:1

The Bible tells us that Jesus (the Word) was with God in the beginning. He helped make the planet we live on. And he's an amazing artist. Seas, skies, sun, moon, hills, deserts, ants, elephants: God made the lot. What's your favourite bit of God's creation?

Pray: God, thank you for your beautiful creation. Thank you especially for .....

Day 2 – Blessing

God also made human beings. All of us are made by him. The first man and woman were called Adam and Eve. God was thrilled to bits with them, and he blessed them.

God created human beings, he created them godlike,
reflecting God's nature. He created them male and female.
God blessed them: "Prosper! Reproduce! Fill Earth! Take
charge! Be responsible for fish in the sea and birds in the
air, for every living thing that moves on the face of Earth."

Genesis 1:27-28

It's not just Adam and Eve who were made to 'reflect God's nature': you were too! God made you one-of-a-kind. There's no one else on earth with that nose, those eyes, that smile. No one else with your fingerprint pattern, or your exact hair colour. God made you, and thinks you're great!

Pray: God, thank you that there's no one else on planet earth like me. Help me to look after the world you have made.

Day 3 – Curse

So it all started well: Adam and Eve and God, all enjoying each others company. But it didn't stay like that for long. God gave Adam and Eve instructions for living in the garden, but they disobeyed. When Adam and Eve broke God's rules, the world was broken too.

And to Adam God said … "I have placed a curse on the ground. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains. All your life you will sweat to produce food, until your dying day. They you will return to the ground from which you came. For you were made from dust, and to the dust you will return.

Genesis 3:17-19

And with that, the possibility of death and violence came into the world. The trust Adam and Eve had enjoyed with each other and with God was gone. They weren't able to stay in the garden God had made, and things started to go wrong …

Pray: God, we can see all around us that the world is broken, that there is violence, that people mistreat each other. That wasn't what you planned. Please help me to live life differently.

Day 4 – Descendants

Fortunately, the story didn't end with Adam and Eve. God had an amazing rescue plan worked out. He spoke to an old man called Abram, and made this promise:

Then the Lord told Abram, "Leave your country, your relatives, and your father's house, and go to the land that I will show you. I will cause you to become the father of a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and I will make you a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you."

Genesis 12:1-3

That was a pretty big promise, cos Abram and his wife got older and older and they had no children. They thought it was too late for them. And here was God telling them that the whole earth would be blessed because of their family! And that would turn out to be true. Abram DID have children. And he was the great great great

Day 5 – Egypt

Abram's family grew and grew. He became the father of Isaac, who became the father of Jacob, who was the father of Joseph (the one with the dreamcoat)! The Israelites (as they became known) went to live in Egypt. At first they were welcomed, but not for long …

… The Israelites had many children and grandchildren. In fact, they multiplied so greatly that they became extremely powerful and filled the land. Eventually, a new king came to power in Egypt who knew nothing about Joseph or what he had done. He said to his people, "Look, the people of Israel now outnumber us and are stronger than we are. We must make a plan to keep them from growing even more … So the Egyptians made the Israelites their slaves.

Exodus 1:7-11

There are lots of different ways to be a slave. Sometimes someone else makes you their slave, like the people of Israel. More often, we can feel like we're slaves because of the things we do wrong, or because we are afraid, or because we feel trapped in difficult situations.

Pray: God, there are still people in the world today who are slaves. Please set them free. And please free us from the things that make us feel like we're slaves.

Day 6 – Freedom

God hadn't forgotten Abram's family. He knew exactly what was going on. He spoke to a man called Moses, and told him:

"I have seen how my people are suffering as slaves in Egypt, and I have heard them beg for my help because of the way they are being mistreated. I feel sorry for them, and I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians. I will bring my people out of Egypt into a country where there is good land, rich with milk and honey."

Exodus 3:7-8

God used Moses to lead the people of Israel out of Egypt, and to set them free. They didn't have to be slaves any more. He promised to lead them to a land of their own, somewhere they could call home.

Pray: God, thank you that you never abandon us. Thank you that you had a plan to set the people of Israel free. Thank you that through Jesus, you are still setting people free today.

Day 7 – Grumble

But getting to the land God had promised was taking a long time, and even though God had set them free from the Egyptians and from slavery, the people weren't happy. They started to grumble about God. Nothing was good enough – even the manna he provided for them (miraculous food which appeared on the ground in the middle of the desert so that they would have enough to eat).

But the people began to grow impatient along the way, and they began to murmur against God and Moses. "Why have you brought us out here to die in the wilderness?" they complained. "There is nothing to eat here and nothing to drink. And we hate this wretched manna!"

Numbers 21:5

Sometimes we don't understand what God is doing. Why doesn't he answer our prayers in the way we want him to? Why does he allow so much to go wrong in our world? It's ok to tell God how we feel.

Pray: God, sometimes I don't understand what you're doing. Help me to trust you even when that seems difficult.

Day 8 – Holy

On their way to the land God promised them, God gave the people some commandments: guidelines to help them live well together in the land he had promised them. One of them was:

You must be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy.

Leviticus 19:1

Being holy means to be ‘set apart’. Set apart means being God’s people, people who live in a way that shows how good God is and shows everyone else who God is. When Jesus came to earth, he lived a life that was completely holy, lived exactly as God asked. With the help of the Holy Spirit, we’re asked to do the same.

Pray: God, help me to live a life set apart for you, so that those around me can see what you are like.

Day 9 – Israel

Finally, God's people make it to the promised land. And it's every bit as good as God said it would be. There's plenty to eat, and plenty of room for everyone. At last they had a home of their own.

The Lord gave the Israelites the land he had promised their ancestors, and they captured it and settled in it. There still were enemies around Israel, but the Lord kept his promise to let his people live in peace. And whenever the Israelites did have to go to war, no enemy could defeat them. The Lord always helped Israel win. The Lord promised to do many good things for Israel, and he kept his promise every time.

Joshua 21:43-45

We can trust God to keep his promises to us too.

Pray: God, thank you that you never break your promises. Thank you that you kept your promise to Abram's family. Thank you that you keep your promises to us.

Day 10 – Judges

It didn't stay quiet for too long. The people forgot about God, and when they did that, their enemies became more powerful.

Then the Lord raised up judges [leaders] to rescue the people from their enemies. Whenever the Lord placed a judge over Israel, he was with that judge and rescued the people from their enemies throughout the judge's lifetime … But when the judge died the people turned to their corrupt ways, behaving worse than those who had lived before them.

Judges 2:16,18-19

The judges weren't perfect, but they helped the people to live the way God wanted them to – at least for a while! We all need people around us to help us as we try to follow God.

Pray: God, I don't always find it easy to follow you. Thank you for the people who help me to get to know you better.

Day 11 – King

After the judges, the people of Israel asked God for a king. So God gave them what they wanted, and Israel was ruled by a series of different kings. One of these kings was David (of David and Goliath fame.)

David had done what was right in the eyes of the LORD and had not failed to keep any of the Lord's commands all the days of his life …

1 Kings 15:5

"I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to."

Acts 13:22

When David was king, the people of Israel followed God, and God was pleased with him. He was a good leader.

Pray: God, thank you for the people who lead our country. Please help them to make good decisions. Help them to be people who listen to and follow you.

Day 12 – Land

Not all the kings of Israel were like David. When Rehoboam, his grandson, became king, he mistreated the people, so they rebelled against him. The kingdom split in two, with Rehoboam ruling just one group (Judah) and Jeroboam, another king, ruling the whole of the rest of Israel.

The people shouted: “Down with David and his dynasty!” … They called an assembly and made Jeroboam king over all Israel. So only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the family of David.

1 Kings 12:16,20

So the land and the kingdom was divided. The people of Israel and Judah were at war against each other. And both kingdoms had kings who did wrong. In the history of Israel, only a few kings stand out who followed God and did what was right. The rest of them turned against him – and the people followed their lead.

Pray: God, many people today live in lands which are divided, where people who were neighbours one day go to war with each other the next. Please bring your peace and your healing to those places.

Day 13 – Mistake

Things went from bad to worse, as the people kept on making the mistake of turning away from God. He tried to send people to warn them, but they took no notice.

God, the God of their ancestors, repeatedly sent warning messages to them. Out of compassion for both his people and his Temple he wanted to give them every chance possible. But they wouldn't listen; they poked fun at God's messengers, despised the message itself, and in general treated the prophets like idiots. God became more and more angry until there was no turning back.

2 Chronicles 36:15-16

So they were captured by the Babylonians and taken into slavery, taken away from the promised land God had given them. It seemed as though they were right back where they'd started. Sometimes we can feel a bit like that too.

Pray: God, help us not to get trapped in doing things wrong. Help us to listen to you, and to be willing to change when you ask us to.

Day 14 – Night

The people realised that their own mistakes had separated them from God, and they were sad. They couldn't see any way out of the trouble they were in.

No one has come to defend us or to bring about justice. We hoped for a day of sunshine, but all we found was a dark, gloomy night. We feel our way along, as if we were blind; we stumble at noon, as if it were night.

Isaiah 59:9-10

It's horrible trying to find your way in the dark, especially if you don't know the place you're in very well. You stumble along, trying to feel your way along the wall, tripping over the edges of furniture, desperately trying to see a glimpse of light. That was how the people of Israel felt. They knew that only God could help them and rescue them from the darkness they found themselves in.

Pray: God, help me not to rely on my own strength when things are difficult, but to allow you to guide me.

Day 15 – Outcry

So the people did the only thing left for them to do: they cried out to God, hoping that he would rescue them again.

Why do you keep forgetting us? Why dump us and leave us like this? Bring us back to you, God — we're ready to come back. Give us a fresh start.

Lamentations 5:20-21

God is great. He always responds to that kind of prayer. It might not always be in the way we expect. It might not be as quickly as we would want. But he hears us and acts.

Pray: God, waiting can be really difficult. Just waiting for Christmas to come seems to take forever! Help us to be patient in waiting for the big things as well as the little things.

Day 16 – Prophets

God heard his people yet again. So he sent some messengers, prophets like Elijah, Isaiah and Jeremiah. And through them, he started to speak his life words to the people, reminding them about his promises.

Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever … The people who walk in darkness will see a great light ...

Isaiah 9:1-2

These promises pointed the people to God's Life Word, Jesus, who would bring light in the darkness, and hope in the night. There are lots of dark places in the world today which need God's light.

Pray: God, I pray for those parts of the world today that are living in darkness. I pray for those who feel alone. For those who live in warzones. For those who don't have enough food to eat. For those who are sick and can't get the help they need.

Day 17 – Questions

The people of Israel had asked God lots of questions … but God had some too!

Why do you say, O Jacob, and complain, O Israel, "My way is hidden from the Lord, my cause is disregarded by my God"? Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

Isaiah 40:27-28

God reassured them yet again that he had heard their prayers. And he began to answer their questions, telling them bit by bit about this person who would be their rescuer: telling them about Jesus thousands of years before he was born.

Pray: God, thank you that you know everything that is going on in our lives. Thank you that you hear our prayers. Thank you that you never ignore us. Thank you that you teach us about yourself when we listen.

Day 18 – Redeemer

“The Redeemer will come to Jerusalem” says the Lord, “to buy back those in Israel who have turned from their sins.”

Isaiah 59:20

To redeem something (or someone) means to ‘buy back.’ When God sent his Son, Jesus, to earth, he came to buy us back. In a slave market, a price could be offered which would ‘redeem’ the slave, buying back their freedom. The Israelites, in slavery in Babylon, needed to be bought back. We, in slavery to sin and circumstances, need to be bought back too. The baby in the manger at Christmas would grow up to become the Redeemer the Bible speaks about, buying us back with love.

Pray: God, thank you for sending Jesus to us as a tiny baby in a manger, who would one day grow up, give his life for us, and buy us back.

Day 19 – Shepherd

He will feed his flock like a shepherd. He will carry the lambs in his arms, holding them close to his heart. He will gently lead the mother sheep with their young.

Isaiah 40:10-11

Shepherds worked extremely hard. They had to keep finding food and water for their flock. They protected them from wild animals. They made sure that they were safe as they slept. They lived on the hillside with their sheep, making sure that they had everything they needed. They looked after them when they were ill, or when they had lambs. When Jesus came, he called himself the good shepherd. He cares for us with that much attention to detail. If we trust him, he will make sure that we have everything we need.

Pray: God, thank you that on the first Christmas night, the shepherds on the hillside were invited to the party. Thank you that Jesus looks after us with just as much care as a shepherd looks after his sheep.

Day 20 – Teacher

Many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the temple of the God of Israel. There he will teach us his ways, so that we may obey him."

Isaiah 2:3

If we're going to live in the way that God wants us to, we need people to teach us. God promised to teach his people the right way to live. Jesus was a fantastic teacher. Huge crowds of people would gather to hear what he had to say. He taught them how to obey God, not just in his words, but in his actions as well.

Pray: God, thank you for the people who teach us: parents, school teachers, church leaders. Thank you that Jesus is the best teacher. Help us to understand what he says to us – and to act on it.

Day 21 – Universal

God loved the people of this world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die.

John 3:16

God's rescue plan wasn't just going to get the people of Israel out of trouble. The message of Jesus was for the whole world. Everyone is invited to have faith in him.

Pray: God, thank you that the good news of Christmas is for everybody, men and women, young and old, rich and poor, whatever language they speak, whichever country they live in. Thank you that we're all invited to get to know Jesus.

Day 22 – Visit

Amazingly, in Jesus, God became a human being. God visited planet earth as a tiny, vulnerable baby. God was so concerned with us that he came to be one of us, knew what it was like to laugh, cry, be hungry and thirsty, grow up, live life.

Praise the Lord, the God of Israel, because he has visited his people and redeemed them.

Luke 1:68

Who's seen God? No one. But we've seen his only Son, Jesus, and you don't get closer than that.

John 1:18

Pray: God, thank you that you visited us. Thank you that you were born as a baby. Thank you that you know what it's like to be human – the good bits and the bad bits. Help us to remember that this Christmas.

Day 23 – Worship

Thank the Lord! Praise his name! Tell the world what he has done. Oh, how mighty he is! Sing to the Lord, for he has done wonderful things. Make known his praise around the world.

Isaiah 12:4-5

Worship is all about giving someone worth – recognising how great they are, and responding by telling them about it! The more we understand who God is, the more we want to worship him.

Pray: God, you're wonderful! Thank you for your amazing creation, for your great love for us, for your rescue plan for the world. Thank you that we can get to know you.

Day 24 – eXciting

Christmas is really really really exciting! It's great fun counting down to Christmas day, looking forward to it coming, and enjoying getting ready for it together.

This is how the birth of Jesus Christ came about: His mother Mary was engaged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be with child through the Holy Spirit … All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet: "The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel" – which means "God with us."

Matthew 1:18,22-23

When Mary found out she was expecting a baby, she must have felt all sorts of different emotions. She was probably shocked and surprised, but also really excited that God had chosen her to carry this special baby: a baby God's messengers had talked about thousands of years before; the one they'd all been waiting for.

Pray: God, thank you that when you're looking for people to be part of your plan, you use ordinary people like Mary. Thank you for the excitement of looking forward to Christmas.

Day 25 – Yours

Christmas Day is here at last! We've only been waiting for 24 days – but can you imagine how excited people must have been on that first Christmas day? God's people had been waiting for thousands of years for this child to be born. The angels announce it with massive excitement. For Mary, nine months of pregnancy are over. Her baby is born at last. Born for us.

For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. And the government will rest on his shoulders. These will be his royal titles: Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

Today in the town of David a Saviour has been born to you;
he is Christ the Lord.

Luke 2:11

Pray: God, thank you for all the fun we have celebrating Jesus' birthday. Thank you for the gift of your Son.

Day 26 – Zion

In the Bible, Zion is the name given to the place where God lives with his people. When Jesus came to earth, God lived among us for a short time as a human being. But when Jesus comes again, we will live with God forever. There will be a new heaven and new earth. And it will all be perfect – just as God intended in the very beginning.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the old heaven and the old earth had disappeared. And the sea was also gone. I heard a loud shout from the throne saying, “Look, the home of God is now among his people! He will live with them, and they will be his people. God himself will be with them. He will remove all of their sorrows, and there will be no more death or crying or sorrow or pain. For the old world and its evils are gone forever.”

Revelation 21:1,3

Pray: God, thank you that right from the very beginning, you had a plan for us. Thank you that one day we’ll be able to be with you forever. Thank you that you will put an end to death, suffering, tears and pain. Thank you that your kingdom will never end.

A note to the reader

If you want to know more about Jesus you can read the whole story of his life in the Bible, starting with one of the gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. You could also visit a church, or talk to the person who pointed you to this e-book. Visit www.sgmlifewords.com for more words of life.

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